

SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY



Solano County Food Bank Operations



2004-2005 Grand Jury Report

Issued: June 28, 2005

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I. Reason for Investigation

The Grand Jury elected to review the Food Bank operations in Solano County.

II. Procedures

The Grand Jury:

- Requested and reviewed information concerning the food bank operations in the cities of Benicia, Dixon, Fairfield, Rio Vista, Suisun City, Vacaville and Vallejo
- Requested and reviewed information from Solano County
- Requested and reviewed information from the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- Interviewed the Executive Director of the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- Toured the Solano County Food Bank's operations

III. Background

The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, which is a non-profit agency, had its beginning in 1997 when the Food Bank of Contra Costa assumed responsibility for the Solano County Food Bank. The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano's stated mission is to feed the needy, or put them in contact with those agencies: local, county, state and federal, that feed the needy, by using its resource directory. None of the programs run by the Food Bank or its member agencies is meant to sustain a family over a long period of time. For sustainability, there are a number of other federal programs that needy families can take advantage of. Today, the combined food banks are managed by a seventeen-member volunteer board of directors and a paid full-time executive director.

The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano has an annual budget of approximately \$3.4 million. The Solano County portion of the Food Bank has two full-time paid employees, a part-time dietician and receives approximately 30,000 hours per year in volunteer aid. Volunteers come from all over the County. Because of the large volunteers, the Food Bank spends only six percent of the \$1.2 million allocated to Solano County on overhead. The major source of revenue comes from contributions of both money and food. Additional funding sources include federal, state, county and local allocations. Overall revenue has increased while government funding has decreased. Also decreased is the amount of food donated by supermarket chains who are now selling their excess food to discount markets. The increase can be attributed to a very active fundraising program. Money is also received from membership fees paid by various independent charitable organizations who wish to belong to the Food Bank and some of these also sponsor other food programs for the needy. Additionally, there is a small mark-up and handling fee paid on food purchased from the Food Bank by the charitable organizations. All of this money is needed to fund the ever increasing cost of food for an ever increasing number of people in the program.

The Solano Food Bank sponsors three programs which together feed approximately 40,000 people. These programs are: the Food Assistance Program, the Brown Bag Program and the Food For Children Program. In order to qualify for these programs, certain criteria must be met. Distribution of food for these three programs takes place at various sites throughout the County. Remarkably, with the

enormous volume of food, including perishables, that is distributed by the Solano County Food Bank, only three percent is lost annually.

III. Findings and Recommendations

Finding #1 – Food pantries in every city in Solano County receive services from the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. Currently four Solano cities and Solano County contribute to the Food Bank. Three cities, Rio Vista, Suisun City and Vacaville do not contribute to the Food Bank but organizations within these cities receive Food Bank services.

Recommendation #1 – The Grand Jury recommends that all cities contribute to the Food Bank.

V. Comments

The Grand Jury commends the efforts made by the staff and Board of Directors of the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano for keeping overhead so low. Furthermore, the Grand Jury applauds the efforts of the many volunteers who facilitate the rapid turnaround of perishable foods.

As many as 40 percent of the needy people living in the County may not be receiving aid.

The Grand Jury suggests that the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano increase its efforts to inform needy residents about food resources, especially those persons who are recent immigrants, those who are unable to speak or read English and those who are not acquainted with established service providers.

Some of the food that used to be donated by supermarkets to the Food Bank is instead being sold to food outlet stores. The Grand Jury suggests that the Food Bank continue its efforts to create stronger ties with the farmers of Solano County. In reaching out to the farmers for donations, the Food Bank may be able to receive a greater variety of fresh produce.

VI. Affected Agencies

- Solano County Department of Health & Social Services
- City of Benicia
- City of Dixon
- City of Fairfield
- City of Rio Vista
- City of Suisun City
- City of Vacaville
- City of Vallejo
- Courtesy copy: Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano